



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

MLK Day is a day on not a day off

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a day on, not a day off. A day on, improving the community; meeting the needs of the least fortunate of our people; avoiding the failures of separate but equal. We respect this day honoring King through the determination, grit and sacrifices of many motivated people.

As we reflect on MLK Jr., the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom comes to mind. We must remember the spirit of unity, hope and love for one another that it fostered. Remembering is especially important in this current toxic environment where racial animosity is so prevalent and overt.

Lillian Stanton Patterson, a former curator at the Alexandria Black History Museum, said she remembers the eve of the march. She recalls the excitement she felt when passing the Lincoln Memorial, so colorful with massive floodlights in preparation for the next day's big event.

That sight strengthened Patterson's resolve to participate in the march. At the march, she and her friends arrived at the far end of the reflection pool. They were excited to be in the crowd but were unable to see the podium speakers. It was a historic day forever etched in her memory.

Many Alexandrians participated in the march. Among them were Gwen Day-Fuller and her family, who rode the chartered bus to Washington. Day-Fuller, now a retired teacher, shared memories of her participation in the March on Washington. She recalled the struggle for civil rights and the inspiration felt by the thousands there on that historic day.

"I grew up in a southern city under many unfair laws and circumstances. We could not do many things that white children could do. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a wonderful name throughout the country and people were talking about him. It was just such an honor to think that I might have an opportunity to be at arm's length from him and to be able to hear him speak about what was going on in the country with regards to civil rights.

"One evening we had gone to visit relatives and as we were saying our good-byes at the door, a car with about four men came around the corner and started yelling the 'n-word' from the window and actually threw firecrackers in the midst of our group. I was the one who got injured. I had a burn on my leg and I had to be rushed to the hospital. I think that was one of the high points, in terms of negativism around this for me.

"There were thousands of people from all over the world at the March. There was such a feeling of calmness and peace and love and people just seemed so filled with hope. And I think that's how we were feeling too, to think that this minister was coming to speak to all of America about the problems we had and to come up with some solutions."



**LILLIAN
PATTERSON**



**GWEN
DAY-FULLER**



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Here we are, 57 years later. Much progress has been made but we are still fighting the battles for equality and freedom with faith, love and commitment.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.